

Charlie Safford



February 21, 1922- February 18, 2009

More than sixty years ago Charlie Safford flew combat missions in B-17 bombers during World War II. He served as a Tech Sergeant from 1942 to 1945 in the US Army Air Corps. "There was many a hole in the plane," he remembers, "but our guys on the ground were great at patching them up."

On February 18, Charlie passed away peacefully at the New Hampshire Veterans Home—*his* Home—with members of his family beside him and hundreds of his friends (staff and residents) nearby.

For the past the past eight years Charlie lived at the New Hampshire Veterans Home with fellow veterans from World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. He became vice president of the Residents' Council six years ago and served as its president for five years. On April 4, 2007 he was honored with the Judith D. Griffin Advocacy Award. The award, created by the New Hampshire Office of the Long Term Care Ombudsman Advisory Board, is presented annually to recognize persons who have made outstanding contributions to enhancing the quality of care, quality of life, and the enhancement of the rights of residents of long-term care facilities.

In a letter to Safford, the New Hampshire Office of the Long Term Care Ombudsman Advisory Board commented, "What you do for the Residents of New Hampshire Veterans Home exemplifies this mission. Your efforts to advocate on behalf of all Veterans at the Veterans Home by serving as the Resident Council President, helping residents to problem-solve, following up with resolution of issues and advocating for the residents' needs who may not be able to advocate for themselves all add up to the selection of you as this year's candidate."

Safford was also honored in October, 2008 by Governor John Lynch, who presented him with a proclamation recognizing his military

service, community service, and extraordinary commitment to his fellow residents at the New Hampshire Veterans Home in Tilton.

Charlie was a writer and belonged to the NH Veterans Home Writers Group. One of his last poems, "Final Journey," was just published in Veterans' Voices, the NHVH Creativity Magazine and pays tribute to the passing of a fellow resident. In the last stanza of the poem he said,

"Nothing I can say can possibly express the honor we share each day,
As we enjoy meals, rooms, stories, experiences, pleasures,
While we travel this road to the destiny we will all share in some way,
To reach the Shangri-la we hope will be our future treasure."

Charlie was always modest about receiving recognition for work he simply believed "was the right thing to do." He would say, "I'm humbled by it. I'm tremendously honored, but I'm just doing what the residents elected me to do. I try hard to listen and see what can be improved." He explained that when residents came to him with something they didn't know how to solve, "I tell them how to solve it, I tell them who can help, or I solve it for them—The other officers on the Residents Council do the same."

In an address to the Winnisquam High School Graduating Classes of 2007, Charlie's genuineness and love for other people came through. He said, "To the students who made the time and effort to come here to the Veterans Home, we must salute you for your extraordinary presence among us.

"You shared with us, played with us, talked with us, and generally caused us to feel important to you and to ourselves. Your cheerful attitude brought many of us to the realization that, we too, still have a spark of youth left within us. You have not only given us joy and pleasure but a companionship many of us have longed for.

"As you progress through the steps of your life and climb the ladders of challenges you will face, we are confident that you have the tenacity and the stamina—along with your ability to share your lives so willingly—to accomplish anything you wish to attempt.

We here at the Home are so very proud and thankful to have been a small part of your lives. Our hearts are enlarged because of your care and love.

Our lives have been enlightened. Our days have been filled with enjoyment from your presence.”

Last spring we interviewed Charlie for an article about volunteering at Spaulding Youth Center. When we asked him how he liked volunteering, he said, “I like it a lot,” and went on to explain why.

“When I was eight or ten,” he recalled, “I hurt my leg. I could hardly walk—I just dragged my left leg. My parents sent me to a hospital for crippled children and I stayed there for two years.”

“Every Sunday I used to get dressed up and wait in the reception area for someone to visit me. In two years, my mother came once. My grandparents came maybe a half dozen times. My father never showed up. After a while I gave up and didn’t get dressed up any more.”

“So now you know why I go to Spaulding. I don’t think about ‘why,’ I just try to be a friend. I’m not a doctor, just a friend. I’m not judgmental, or a disciplinarian, or a person in authority. I’m just a friend, and I’ve been in their shoes.”

Charlie says, “I used to look back and feel sad about those years but now I’m thankful for the lessons I’ve learned first hand. When I’m at Spaulding, I let everything happen. The more you try to get the children to do something, the further back they’ll go. The more often I go, the closer I get to the kids. I let them come to me.”

Charlie wouldn’t want us to be sad at his passing. He left us a legacy of kindness, compassion, and understanding. He would want each of us to honor his life by continuing that legacy. Charlie, our days have been filled with enjoyment from your presence, and we will always be grateful.



Charlie Safford volunteering at Spaulding Youth Center in May, 2008. Charlie said, “When I’m at Spaulding, I let everything happen. The more you try to get the children to do something, the further back they’ll go. The more often I go, the closer I get to the kids. I let them come to me.”